

FINAL

**Talking Points Prepared for Delivery by James B. Comey  
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Major County Sheriffs' Association/Major Cities Chiefs Association  
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## **Introduction**

- Been Director for 16 months now; have traveled to all of our FBI field offices and many of our international offices
- About to go on the road again, for two reasons
  - FBI is a **deployed** force
  - Need to continue to learn from and listen to many people, including all of you
    - Confidence / pride and humility [BARRY SANDERS]
- Today, I'd like to talk about the FBI's current priorities and some of the challenges we face as a law enforcement family

## **Terrorism**

- After 16 months in this job, I believe it still makes sense for counterterrorism to be our top priority
- Michael Steinbach, our AD for Counterterrorism, will be giving you a detailed briefing later today
- Don't want to steal his thunder, but I do want to share a few thoughts

- The threat has changed in two significant ways since I was last in government
- **First**, while the core al Qaeda tumor in the AfPak region has been reduced, that cancer has **metastasized**
  - The progeny of al Qaeda — AQAP, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Khorasan, and ISIL
- **Second** huge change is the explosion of terrorist propaganda and training on the Internet
  - No longer necessary to get a terrorist operative into the U.S. to recruit — now they can do it through the Internet
    - Poisonous propaganda, training material [NON-METALLIC BOMB FORMULA — AQAP]
  - This has allowed terrorists in ungoverned spaces to touch lots of troubled souls around the world, with two goals
    - Attract them to the cause, and get them to travel
    - If they can't travel, motivate them to do something at home
- Because of this change, the challenge for us in the United States has two dimensions
  - Lots of troubled souls in our nation, not centered in any particular area — they are attracted to travel to the ungoverned spaces; something we worry about every day
  - New dimension in ISIL's message: If you can't travel, kill somebody in our name — that's how you will serve our global jihad

- If it's somebody in uniform, great; and if you can videotape it, that's best of all
- This is a significant change from a decade ago
  - We used to count on the culture of core al Qaeda: "We have to do the big attacks, or we will lose face" — they saw attacks on shopping malls or shooting a police officer as a confession of weakness
  - That has changed with this metastasis
  - We face a new threat: people in pajamas in their basement on the internet, getting all the info they need to radicalize, getting the training they need, and getting the direction to emerge and do something to harm innocents
- That's where you come in
  - [RECENT SVTC]
  - Perception that CT is a NYC-based thing, a Washington-based thing
    - [CINCINNATI – CORNELL CASE]
    - FBI has [ ] open investigations focused on so-called homegrown violent extremists
    - [ ]
- That's why our partnerships are so important
- It is highly unlikely to be an FBI Special Agent who will first see or hear about some troubled soul who appears to be radicalizing on the Internet

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- It is far more likely to be a deputy sheriff or police officer on patrol — somebody who knows the neighborhood
- We need to remain tightly connected to each other, through partnerships like JTTFs and fusion centers — so that if someone sees something, it moves at the speed of light to the rest of us and we can respond
  - Your departments provide the majority of the staff in our JTTFs and are responsible for the majority of fusion centers
  - You commit some of your best people and a lot of resources to these efforts, even with all the other challenges on your plate
  - I'm so grateful to you for your commitment to these partnerships
  - My goal is to continue making sure you have all the information you need, so that we can meet this threat together

## **Intelligence and Threat Priorities**

- Closely connected to this is the way the FBI is approaching our work today
- I inherited from Bob Mueller an organization that we call "threat-based and intelligence-driven"
- That means trying to be more thoughtful about what we work
- [WORKING THE INBOX]
- Today, we are constantly involved in a process of trying to understand the threats we face — what's out there, what we see, what might we be missing

- We sit in Washington and our 56 field offices and ask ourselves: What are the bad things that could happen here, and how can we help with those?
- Then we rank those national security and criminal threats, at the national level and in each field office
- Then we compare the national and local views ... bang them together and reconcile them ... and come up with a threat prioritization ranking for each of our field offices
- In short, we try to look out beyond our inbox to assess what the dangers are, what's being done about them, and, given that and our resources, what we should spend time on
- Part of the reason we do this is so that we can better respond to your needs
- Where you need us to be in each city may be different
- [FREE SAFETY METAPHOR] – SIR, BE AWARE THAT THIS AUDIENCE MIGHT HAVE HEARD YOU USE THIS BEFORE
- That is the mindset we're pushing in our organization
- You should see and hear this mindset in each of our field offices
- I hope that you already have a strong working relationship with the Special Agent in Charge in your community
- If you don't, I need to hear about it
- Whatever you're working, whatever your concerns, we want to hear about them so we can help

## Going Dark

- Now I want to discuss two issues that are very much on my mind, and that I suspect are on your minds
- One of the biggest challenges we face is “Going Dark”
- I’ve been talking about this a lot, because I was shocked by this when I came back to government
- When I left public service in 2005, this problem was blinking on my periphery
- When I came back in late 2013, it was blinking directly in front of me, because of
  - Proliferation of communication modes
  - Proliferation of encryption
- Those of us charged with protecting our citizens aren’t always able to access the evidence we need to prosecute crime and prevent terrorism, even with lawful authority
- We have the legal authority to intercept and access communications and information pursuant to court order, but we often lack the technical ability to do so
- We face two overlapping challenges
  - Data in motion
  - Data at rest

- And both types of data are increasingly encrypted
- It's the equivalent of a closet that can't be opened ... a safe that can't be cracked — places that are **beyond the reach of the law**
- The notion that the marketplace could create something that would prevent that closet from ever being opened, even with a properly obtained court order, makes no sense to me
- I'm deeply concerned about this, and I believe we got here because people fail to understand why we in law enforcement do what we do, and how we do it
- This is not just a national security issue; it also has serious implications for our work as a law enforcement community to protect **public safety**
- We need to be able to access communications and information to bring people to justice
- And we need to be able to do so quickly and efficiently — when time is of the essence
- Unfortunately, we are seeing more and more cases where we believe significant evidence resides on a phone or a laptop, but we can't crack the password
- We will continue to throw every lawful tool we have at this problem, but it's costly, inefficient, and it takes time
  - I wish we had the benefit of time in our line of work; we usually don't

- I also know that you don't have the resources, the personnel, or the technical specialists to handle these issues on an ad hoc basis
- We need a long-term fix, so we are all on the same page
  - So that communication providers know what is expected of them under the law, and so that we can do the jobs the American people have entrusted us to do, in the way they would want us to do them
- I don't have a perfect solution, but I believe it's time to start the conversation
- I hope that we can find a way — together — to make sure the American public better understands the work we do, and the lawful means by which we do it
- Huge fan of privacy; deeply skeptical of government power
- Skepticism is good — but as a country, we don't want to drift to a place where we have to tell people, "I can't"
- We need to find a way to balance privacy and skepticism about government with our need to protect innocent people
- This isn't a "D.C. issue" — it's an American issue
- I hope you will help me by encouraging these conversations in your communities

## **Threats to Law Enforcement**

- The second issue I want to discuss is threats to law enforcement

- We've seen a disturbing increase in shootings and ambush-style attacks against law enforcement officers
- One of the saddest things I do as FBI Director is call the departments of officers killed in the line of duty in our country, to express the FBI's sorrow and offer our support
- I'm making far too many calls
  - We are doing all we can to understand what's going on, and to offer tools and training and techniques to keep our folks safe — more to come on this
- When I was at Detective Ramos's funeral in New York, I was struck by something Bill Bratton said
- It's healthy for us as a democracy to talk about how law enforcement interacts with the communities we protect — particularly with communities of color
- As we do that, I'm determined for us do as Bill Bratton suggested: We need to find ways to **see each other better**
- Those are wise words, and I hope that part of that seeing involves an appreciation for just what policing involves
- It's incumbent upon us in law enforcement to understand the concerns of our communities, but it has to run both ways
- The citizens of this country need to really **see** the men and women of law enforcement — see what they see through the windshields of their patrol cars and on street corners
- As you already know, what they will see are officers overwhelmingly doing the right thing for the right reasons
- People don't join law enforcement to protect only white people, or black people, or Native Americans, or Hispanic

people, or Asian people — they join because they want to protect **all people**

- As we continue these important conversations in our country, I hope we'll all make an effort to see each other better
  - Later today, I'll be coming back to hear Commissioner Chuck Ramsey talk about the new "Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" initiative — I look forward to listening to this important conversation

## **Conclusion**

- [TELESCOPE OF LIFE]
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today

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